JUSTICE, PEACE AND THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

a call
to common commitments
on issues that are urgent
for the survival of humankind

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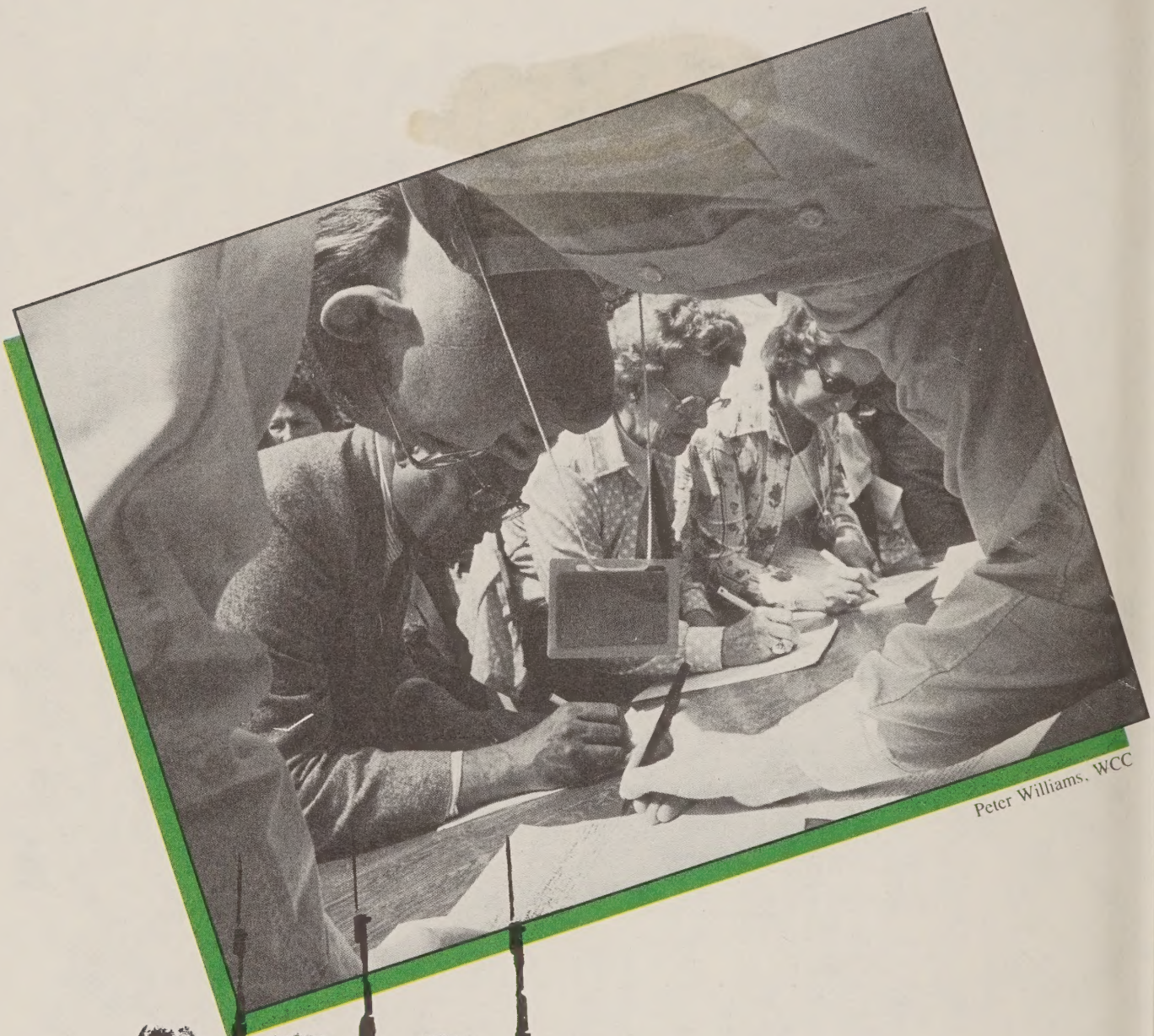

Peter Williams, WCC

Franklin Ishida

"A conciliar process of mutual commitment (covenant) for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation" is a phrase that is being heard more and more in ecumenical discussions, church assemblies and in the concerns of Christian movements. Where did it come from? What does it mean? How can people and churches become involved in it?

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Where did it come from?

The phrase emerged from what was probably the most representative international gathering of Christians in this decade — the Sixth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1983. Meeting in Vancouver, Canada, delegates of churches from all over the world asked the WCC to engage churches "in a conciliar process of mutual commitment (covenant) to justice, peace and the integrity of creation". It is a Christian response to the forces and trends that jeopardize life in the world.

The delegates spoke out of their own situations and experiences, and in a representative way spoke for all of us. Some came from situations of intense human suffering. Where many have little or nothing and a few have more than enough. Where human rights are violated, and many are tortured and killed. Where people face discrimination and are treated as less than human because of the colour of their skin, ethnic origin or sex. They spoke of justice not simply as a concept, but as a cry for vindication. As a prayer. That what is wrong may be set right, so that life may be liveable and human dignity be affirmed.

Some came from war-torn countries where military conflict is fomented and maintained by selfish interest groups. Still others came from situations where nuclear weapons are in place as grim reminders of an impending holocaust. For them, too, peace was not just an idea. It was a yearning for a new world order in which wars and the threats of war will cease. It was the occasion to say "No" to war as a way of settling disputes; and "No" to nuclear weapons for offence or defence.

Others were conscious of the terrible violence done to creation — to nature and human beings — in the insatiable drive for human progress. Polluted air and water, diminishing natural resources, continuing extinction of forms of plant and animal life pointed to the violence being done to creation. Here, too, the integrity of creation was not viewed as a mere concept. It was a plea to recognize that we live in an interdependent world — a world of relationships and delicate balances. To ignore the

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wholeness or integrity of creation in the unbridled pursuit of human progress is to make this planet finally unliveable.

They listened to each other. They realized that the struggles for justice, for peace and for the integrity of creation were interlinked. There had to be one cohesive struggle for life. To confront the powers of death with the power of Jesus Christ — the Life of the World.

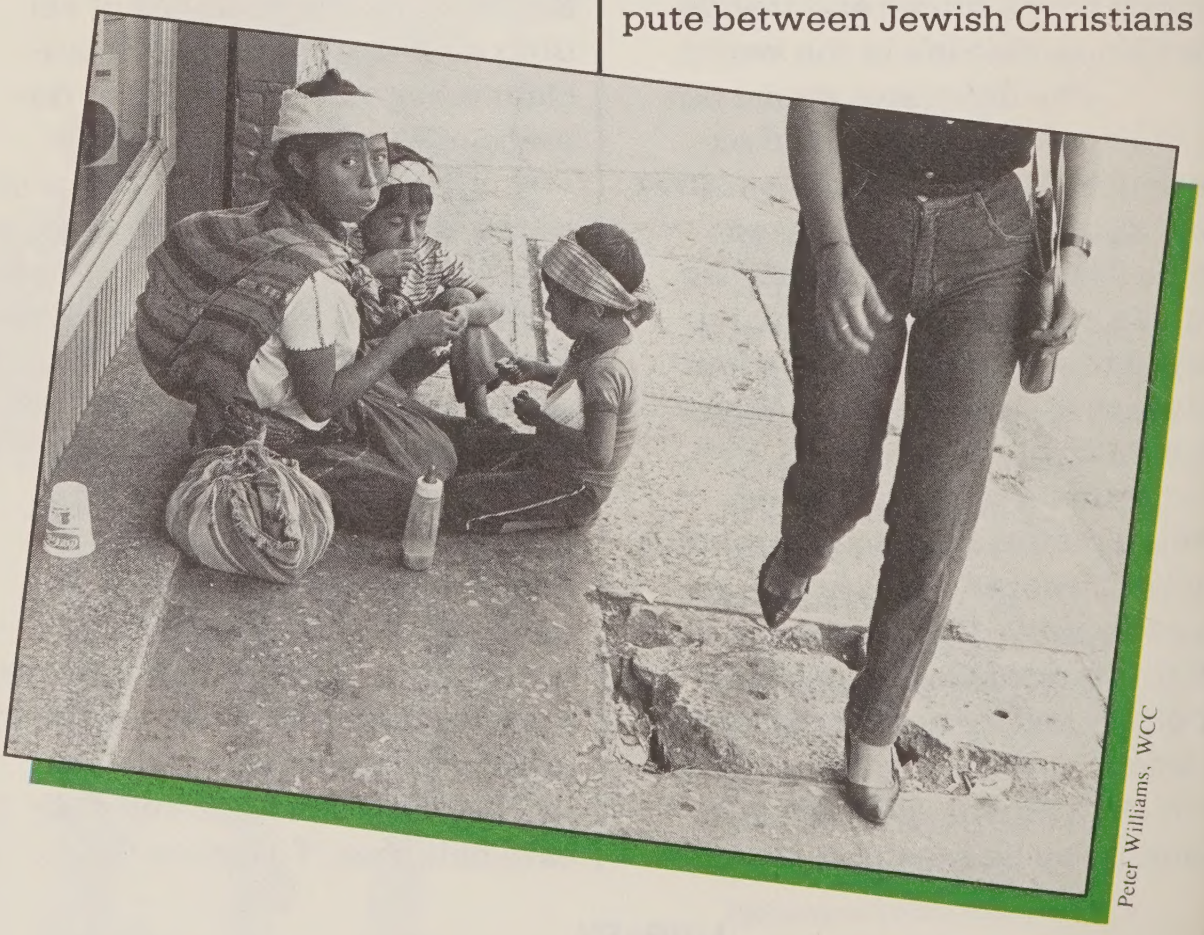
They spoke together. Now is the time for commitment, both as an act of will and a will to act.

"JPIC" is shorthand. It refers to the process of committing ourselves to each other in a common struggle. It assumes that justice, peace and the integrity of creation are inter-related.

What does it mean?

The Vancouver call to engage churches "in a conciliar process of mutual commitment (covenant) to justice, peace and the integrity of creation" may sound like ecumenical jargon. But what it means may be stated more simply.

Throughout its long history, from time to time, the church has met in councils to resolve disputes regarding the understanding and practice of the Christian faith and to take common positions regarding its mission — its responsibility to the world. The earliest of such councils was the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) which was called to settle a dispute between Jewish Christians



Peter Williams, WCC

A light is a protest at midnight. It is a non-conformist. It says to the darkness "I beg to disagree."
Samuel Rayan, S.J.

Peter Williams, WCC

and Gentile Christians. By agreeing that both forms of Christianity were valid, since both believed in the same Lord, Jesus Christ, and both preached the same gospel, a schism or division of the church was averted.

Unfortunately, we are now in a divided situation of many churches, each with its own tradition. Each church has its own assembly, synod or council, so that a council of the whole church, in the strict sense of the word council, is not possible at present, but is rather a hope for the future.

Yet, the Vancouver call invites us to come together again. It is based on a conviction that Christians and churches can say and do important things together about justice, peace and the integrity of creation because we share a common faith in Jesus Christ — the Life of the World. It views the coming together for justice, peace and the integrity of creation as another important step in realizing the visible unity of the church.

Confronted by powerful forces that oppress, make war and despoil the earth, can churches today speak and act together in each place? Can they make binding commitments or covenant to resist the forces of death and affirm life?

To participate in JPIC is to dare to answer *Yes* to those questions.

A faith response

For churches and Christians to answer Yes to speak and act together is a response of faith. It is to say quite clearly that we cannot proclaim with integrity our faith in Jesus Christ as the Life of the World and be unconcerned about the threats that face God's creation — humanity and nature.

It is to agree with the church leaders who met in Harare, Zimbabwe, in December 1985 that "apartheid stands condemned by the gospel of Jesus Christ and that any theology which supports it or condones it is heretical". It is to affirm with them that the struggle for liberation is a struggle grounded in faith.

Keystone

It is to know the predicament of Archbishop Dom Helder Camara of Brazil: "When I give food to the poor, I am called a saint! But when I ask why the poor have no food, I am called a trouble-maker!"

It is to dare to affirm with the delegates at the Vancouver Assembly that even the strategy of nuclear deterrence with its frightening potential to destroy life is against the gospel.

It is to groan with a newspaper report that began: "If only fish could cry!" when thousands of dead fish were floating on the chemically polluted Rhine river.

We are called to speak out and act together against the powers that deny life because of what we believe about the Triune God — Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer — who has placed us in this world and who pleads with us to choose life and to affirm it for others. This is our mission.

It is not a self-righteous commitment. Confessing our faith together goes along with confessing together our sins, our complicity in maintaining structures that keep people hungry and homeless, that study war and wage it, that defile, often irreversibly, the only environment we have.

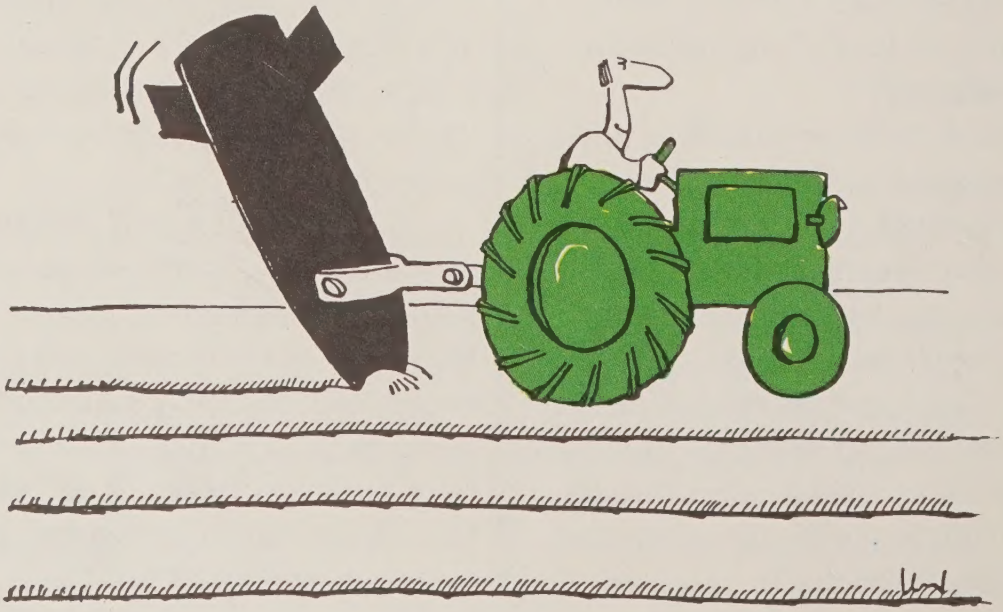
Rooted in the Bible and Christian traditions

"JPIC" may be new and unfamiliar to many. But the emphases and commitments it draws on are very old.

The common faith commitments to which we are being called in the JPIC process are rooted in the bibilical faith and in the traditions handed down through the ages since the time of the early church.

JPIC invites us to read the Bible again from the situations in which we are. To hear the cry of the oppressed and God's answer to their prayer (Ex. 3:7f.; Rev. 21:1-4). To feel the yearning for peace and to await and work for the time when wars will cease and each one can live unmolested (Micah 4:1-5). To groan with the whole of creation for the liberation of all God's children from avarice and self-seeking (Rom. 8:18-25). To realize for our time the ministry of Jesus who came to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind and the year of jubilee when all debts will be cancelled, all sins forgiven, and the whole world reconciled to him (Luke 4:18-19).

It also invites us to probe the rich Christian traditions to which we belong. To appropriate for our time what we learn from the teachings of the church through the ages and from its responses to the questions regarding the survival of humankind. This task is important because JPIC challenges each church at the deepest level of its witness to Jesus Christ and requires the strongest possible commitment on the basis of its faith and its

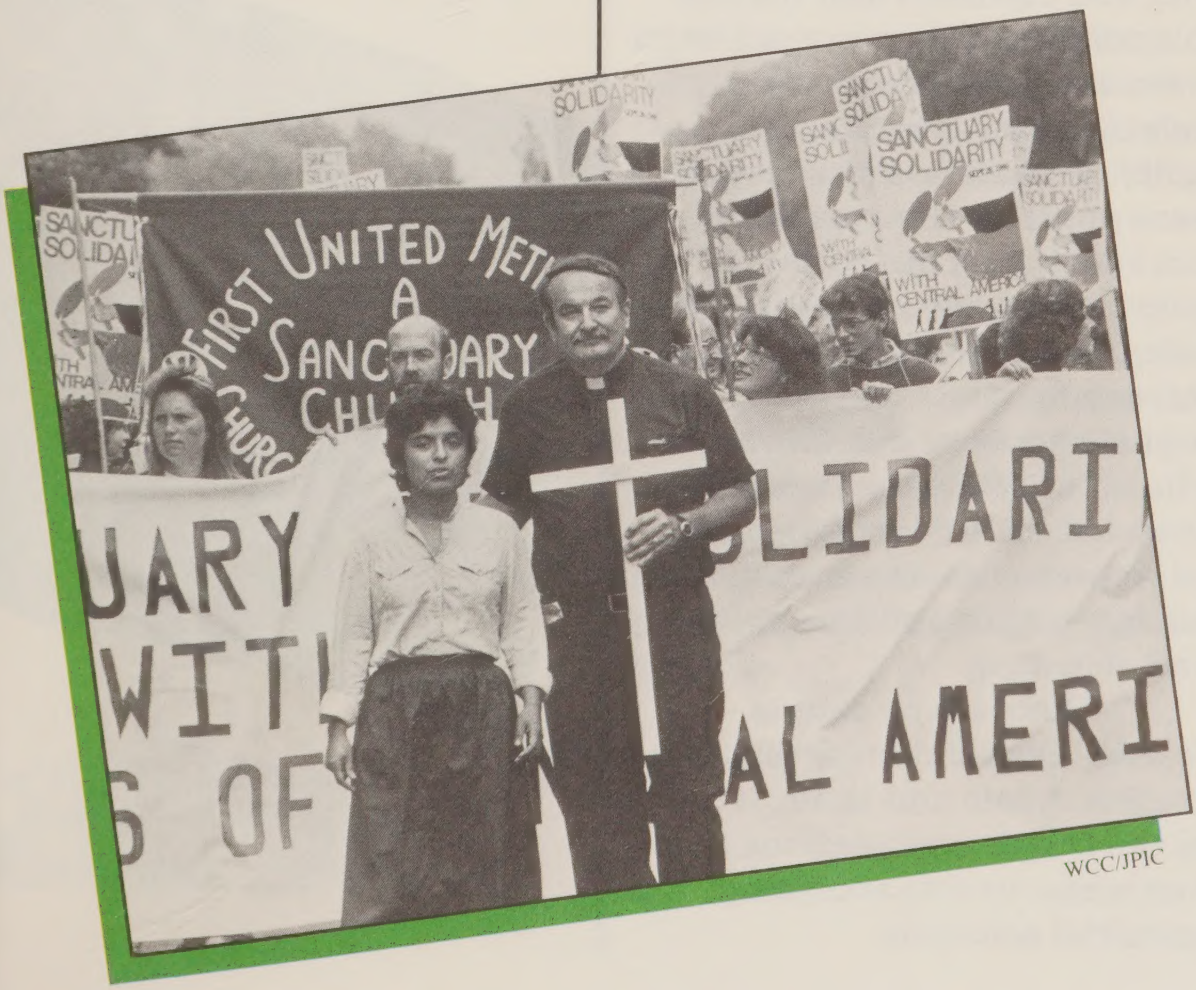


understanding of the gospel and the church.

Here we face differences. To give a few examples: One tradition speaks of the "church of the covenant" to highlight God's gracious gift and faithfulness to God's people and the whole of creation and, at the same time, the call to do God's loving will, especially with regard to the rights of the poor. Another holds up the "eucharistic vision" to express "the liturgy after the liturgy" as a way of stating its commitment to JPIC. The "confessing church" makes its response in a given historical situation, on the one hand, by affirming those things that make for life and, on the other, negating those things that are perceived as threats to life.

Obviously, the understanding of the biblical mandates that undergird our commitments to JPIC will not be the same in every place or in every tradition. Even the form of expressing a commitment to speak and work together will differ from place to place.

The challenge is that we view these differences not as obstacles but as a rich variety of contributions to the JPIC process, so that JPIC may indeed be the occasion for letting the various commitments converge into one witness.



WCC/JPIC

Based on careful analysis

The search for the biblical roots of JPIC is not an exercise in finding prooftexts to confirm what we already believe and justify what we are already doing. Biblical and theological insights cannot be applied to contemporary situations without analyzing and understanding these situations.

JPIC assumes that the struggles for justice, for peace and for the integrity of creation are inter-related. Whatever our point of entry into the struggle, we finally have to deal with the whole complex of issues that is JPIC, and therefore also the possible conflicts that may exist between the three complementary goals of justice, peace and the integrity of creation. If the way to peace prevents the oppressed from shaking off the burden of injustice, such peace is not the *shalom* — the wellbeing of the total community — that the prophets spoke about. If in some parts of the world the poor are compelled to cut down trees for fuel, thereby causing ecological damage, creation suffers at the hand of justice.

There are no simple answers. Contemporary reality is complex. Again and again, it defies the simple explanations that often tempt us into accepting superficial solutions.

We require, and in many instances do have, the work of scholars who have wrestled with these questions and analyzed contemporary reality, taking into account the cries and fears as well as the hopes of those who are the victims of injustice, war and selfish greed.

Commitments to justice, peace and the integrity of creation need to be based on biblical and theological insights that are informed by careful analyses of contemporary situations.

They dress my people's wound, but skin-deep only, with their saying, 'all is well'. All well? Nothing is well.

Jeremiah 8:11

A global process

JPIC is primarily a process rather than a programme. It will attempt to bring together the various commitments that have been made for justice, peace and the integrity of creation at local, national and regional levels. It desires that churches and Christians take common positions on the issues that are urgent for the survival of humankind, and make binding commitments with each other to speak and to act together.

In planning the process, several guiding principles have emerged:

The process will be built up from the local and national levels, through the regional level, to a global convocation on JPIC, now scheduled for 1990.

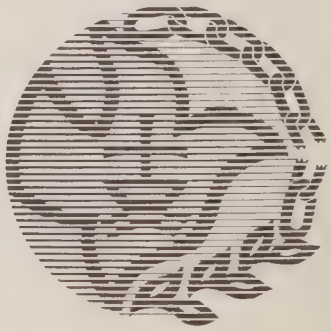
Churches and Christians at the local and national level and then at the regional level should identify in their own contexts the specific issues for JPIC and find their own ways to make binding commitments to each other for justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

Cartoons: Len Munnick

The process is an open-ended one. The global convocation is the main focus for the JPIC pilgrimage during the rest of the 1980s. But the 1990 event is not the end of the road. Whatever that convocation says and does will have to be received by churches and made part of their life.

JPIC is not the exclusive property of the churches. In many parts of the world, Christian movements and action groups have joined together in common struggles for justice, peace and the integrity of creation. These are often the source of the most creative explorations and expressions of what the biblical message implies for the mission of the church in our time. They too are active participants in the JPIC process.

Willingness to put oneself on the line in the struggle for justice locally and globally, active searching for peace between peoples and between nations, deep reverence for the wholeness of creation — these are by no means the vocation of Christians alone among the world's people. Wherever possible, the insights and dedicated lives of people of other faiths and ideologies must enrich and inform the mutual commitments churches and Christians make for JPIC.



The challenge of JPIC

Will JPIC achieve the ambitious aims that have been set out? Are churches and Christians ready to make long-range commitments to and with each other for justice, peace and the integrity of creation? Are they willing to speak and act together? Can the multitude of diverse struggles for justice, peace and the wholeness of creation, in which people are already engaged, be forged together into a global chain of solidarity in faith and witness?

Those are questions of faith and of faithfulness. They are addressed to each one of us. The process is clear. But it will lack substance without the commitments of Christians and churches.

Who will respond?

In the parable about the Last Judgment in Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus accepts one group and rejects the other. The basis for his judgment is important. He does not say: "When that poor person was in need or in bondage you did nothing." Rather: "When *I* was in need and in bondage you did nothing." The message is clear. Today, Jesus meets us through the other person. He is in the cry of the poor and the oppressed. The tears of the refugees and the victims of war are his tears. When God's creation is raped and polluted, Jesus groans in pain.

Who will respond? Those who suffer will respond to another's suffering. Also, those who can feel another's pain.

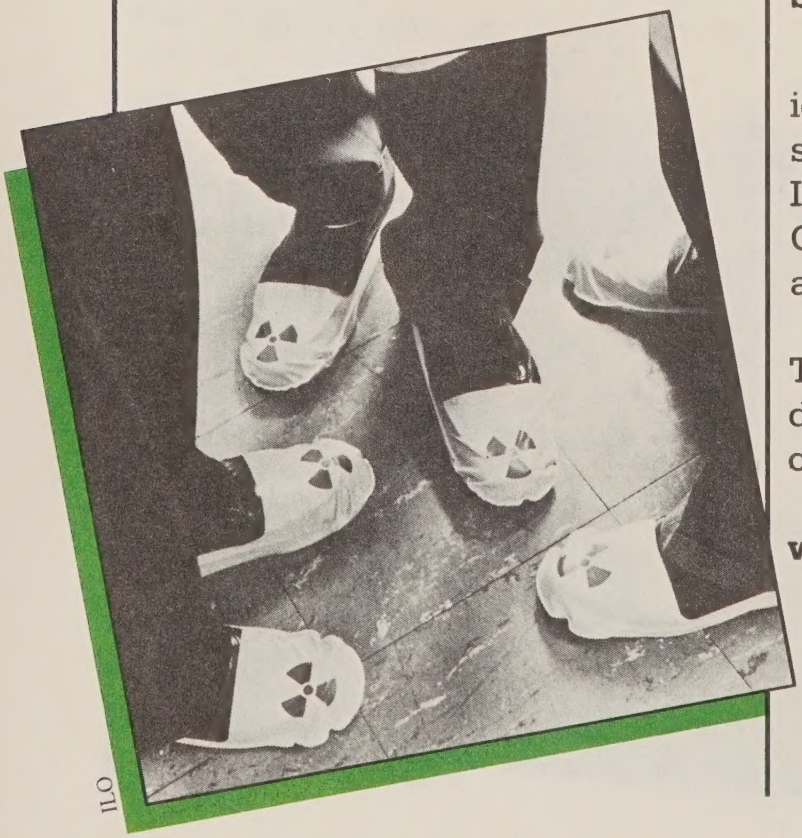
Bärbel von Wartenberg

What can you do?

Step I

How do the threats to justice, peace and the wholeness of creation affect you? How do these threats affect those around you? Can you join together in a common struggle, and include in your concerns the plight of those who are your distant neighbours (in your country and in other parts of the world) but are part of the human family? Can you urge your church to become involved?

To answer Yes and make it happen is to take the first step in the JPIC process. It is to realize the fact that JPIC is not primarily about charity, though that too is important. Rather, the first step is about **solidarity**. The coming together in mutual commitment of those who yearn for a new earth and a new heaven.



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Step II

The community of solidarity could easily fall apart unless it has solid foundations.

— It needs to be rooted in prayer and worship.
— It needs to be grounded in Bible study and Christian traditions.
— It needs to be informed by careful analyses of the contemporary situations.

The second step is about **deepening commitments**.

Step III

Each community of solidarity is part of a larger fellowship — national, regional, global. It is part of the movement of all God's people for a new earth and a new heaven.

It is about inter-linkages. To stretch out our hands in solidarity with all those who are in a common struggle for life.

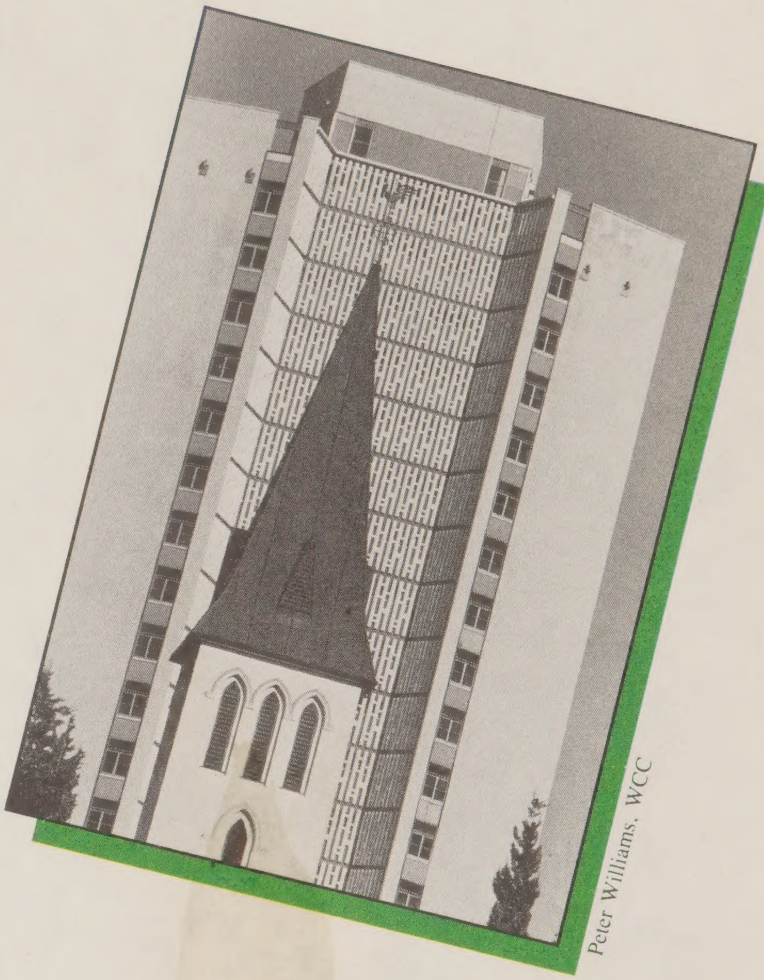
The third step is about **widening the base**.

What resources do we have?

Churches and national and regional ecumenical councils have been informed about the plans for JPIC. They are planning their own national and regional convocations on JPIC. These can provide resources and information.

Along with them, the WCC is preparing the following:

— worship materials for JPIC;
— analyses of contemporary situations;
— the experiences and affirmations of faith of those who are already in the struggle of JPIC;
— study kits on theological discussions of mutual commitments for justice, peace and the integrity of creation;
— justice, peace and the integrity of creation newsletter, to be published quarterly, beginning in June 1987, to share news and views of JPIC from all over the world.



Peter Williams, WCC

Finding out more:

If you would like to be kept informed about what is happening in the global JPIC process, send us your name, address, and the name of the church, community or group to which you belong.

World Council of Churches
JPIC Office
P.O. Box 66
1211 Geneva 20
Switzerland

00002096

JUSTICE, PEACE AND THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

World Council of Churches
P.O. Box 66, 150 route de Ferney
1211 Geneva 2

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